

ST. PAUL, MINN.
PIONEER PRESS

DEC 31 1963

m. 98/378
S. 200,141

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Date: DEC 31 1963

The Case for Congress Committee on CIA

Closer liaison between congress and the central intelligence agency is ably advocated by Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota in an article in the Saturday Evening Post.

In the past he has been a consistent supporter of proposals for a joint house-senate watchdog committee to check on operations of the government's super-secret CIA. In the current article he emphasizes CIA activities of recent years which raise serious questions as to the propriety and wisdom of permitting this agency to exercise its great powers in foreign affairs without being subject to normal congressional accountability.

The CIA, says Senator McCarthy, "has taken on the character of an invisible government answering only to itself." He continues: "Wrapped in its cloak of secrecy, the CIA hints it has overthrown foreign governments, admits that it violates international law and doesn't deny that one of its exploits wrecked a summit conference."

He discusses CIA activities in South Vietnam, Laos, Cuba and Latin America, and the U-2 flight failure over Russia in 1960 that caused the collapse of President Eisenhower's Paris conference with Nikita Khrushchev.

There is no specific congressional committee to check on CIA programs, policies and appropriations, although

there is such a committee to deal with the secret operations of the atomic energy commission. Early in the Eisenhower administration a special study group headed by General Mark W. Clark recommended that a bipartisan committee be established to keep check on the CIA. The Hoover commission on efficiency in government urged a permanent house-senate watchdog committee to deal with CIA.

Thus far congress has acquiesced in the theory that its members should not maintain normal liaison with CIA and be given knowledge as to its expenditures and operations, although it spends many millions of dollars yearly and has thousands of operatives working in ways that affect foreign policy and possibly questions of war and peace.

While the CIA is supposed to be responsible to the president, there are a number of cases where its activities have seemed to collide with those of the state department. The powers of the agency are so great that congress would seem entitled to considerably more information justifying the annual appropriations it makes for CIA. A small, bipartisan joint congressional committee such as Senator McCarthy recommends would provide a practical answer to the problems he describes.

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